

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 5470

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: CU UR MPOL VE
SUBJECT: LA REACTION TO SOVIET AND CUBAN ROLE IN AFRICA

REF: STATE 148740

1. PERCEPTION OF SOVIET AND CUBAN ROLE:
GOV OFFICIALS AND TOP LEADERS OF GOVERNING (AD) PARTY AS
WELL AS MAJOR OPPOSITION (COPEI) PARTY HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR
APPREHENSION OVER CUBAN ACTIVITIES IN AFRICA, PARTICULARLY
CUBA'S ROLE AS A WILLING SURROGATE FOR MOSCOW, SERVING
THE INTERESTS OF THE SOVIET UNION.

2. DEFINITION OF ATTENDANT PROBLEMS: VENEZUELAN LEADERS
STILL HOLD FRESH MEMORIES OF THE CUBAN-BACKED INSURGENCY
IN VENEZUELA OF THE EARLY SIXTIES AND HAVE LEARLY
INDICATED THEIR VIEW THAT CASTRO IS NOT TO BE TRUSTED.
NOT SURPRISINGLY, THEY FEAR THE SIZE AND COMBAT CAPABILITY
OF THE CUBAN MILITARY, WHICH NOW CONSTITUTES THE LARGEST
ARMY IN LATIN AMERICA, AND THERE IS CONCERN THAT THIS
CUBAN MILITARY STRENGTH COULD BE TURNED TOWARD LATIN
AMERICA IN THE FUTURE. THERE IS ALSO CONCERN, PARTICULARLY
FOR VENEZUELA, WHICH HAS PLAYED A MODERATING ROLE AS
SPOKESMAN AND A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE THIRD WORLD AND DC'S,
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THAT CUBA'S INVOLVEMENT IN AFRICAN NATIONAL LIBERATION
MOVEMENTS WILL ENABLE CASTRO TO CAPTURE THE POLITICAL
LEADERSHIP OF THE THIRD WORLD. CUBA'S AFRICAN ACTIVITIES
HAVE ENABLED CASTRO TO ACQUIRE A PROMINENT INTERNATIONAL
ROLE: THE CONCERN IS WHERE AND HOW CASTRO WILL USE HIS
ENHANCED INTERNATIONAL AND MILITARY PROWESS IN THE FUTURE.

3. HANDLING OF PROBLEMS: BY MAINTAINING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH CUABA, THE GOV HOPES TO ACT AS A MODERATING INFLUENCE. PRESIDENT PEREZ HAS ALSO INDICATED IN CONVERSATIONS WITH AMBASSADOR VAKY THAT HE BELIEVES THE USG IS PURSUING A MISTAKEN POLICY IN AFRICA WITH ITS PRESENT CONFRONTATIONAL STANCE TOWARD THE CUBANS OVER THEIR AFRICAN INVOLVEMENT. RATHER, PEREZ BELIEVES, THE USG AND THE WEST SHOULD PURSUE A MORE COMPETITIVE ROLE IN AFRICAN AFFAIRS, OFFERING VIABLE POLITICAL ALTERNATIVES WHICH WOULD SERVE TO PREEMPT CONFLICTS AND THE SUBSEQUENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOVIET AND CUBAN INVOLVEMENT. "COMPETE DON'T CONFRONT," PEREZ SAID, BUT HE HAS ALWAYS SAID THIS PRIVATELY. FOR THE FIRST TIME, HOWEVER, THE GOV HAS BEGUN TO EXPRESS THIS VIEW PUBLICLY. FONMIN CONSAVLI EXPRESSED HIS CONCERN OVER GROWING INTERNATIONALIZATION OF AFRICAN CONFLICTS REPRESENTED BY THE RECENT BELGIAN AND FRENCH INVOLVEMENT WHEN HE STATED TO LOCAL PRESS ON JUNE 6 THAT THE SEVEN WARS NOW IN PROGRESS IN AFRICA REFLECT A "RECOLONIZATION OR RECONQUEST OF AFRICA" AND EXPRESSED FEAR THAT AFRICA WILL DEGENERATE INTO AN IMMENSE VIET NAM.

4. RATHER THAN A DIVISIVE ISSUE, THE CUBAN ROLE IN AFRICA IS PERCEIVED HERE AS A UNIFYING ONE WHICH UNITES LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES IN THEIR FEAR OF A POTENTIALLY AGGRESSIVE AND INTERVENTIONIST LATIN AMERICAN POWER, CONFIDENTIAL

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WILLING TO RENEW ITS ACTIVIST ROLE IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES. BECAUSE OF THIS, AND THE PERCEIVED ROLE AS A SOVIET SURROGATE, CUBA IS PAYING A POLITICAL PRICE IN LATIN AMERICA. STILL, BELOW THE SURFACE, THERE IS ALSO SOME FEELING OF ADMIRATION FOR CASTRO BECAUSE OF HIS ABILITY TO PROJECT HIMSELF INTO A PROMINENT INTERNATIONAL ROLE AND BUILD CUBA INTO A FORMIDABLE MILITARY POWER. VAKY

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